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Gromyko Likely to Take Role as Moscow's Elder Statesman

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MOSCOW—The surprise elevation of Andrei A. Gromyko from foreign minister to president of the Soviet Union will not affect Soviet foreign policy, diplomats and Kremlin officials said Tuesday.

While he resigned as first deputy premier, Gromyko is expected to play the role of elder statesman on selected foreign issues, the observers said in the wake of the changes in high offices announced early in the day.

Soviet leader Mikhail S. Gorbachev, who had been expected to assume the presidential title to go with his powerful post as Communist Party general secretary, indicated that he shunned the additional job to devote more time to the lagging economy.

Eduard A. Shevardnadze, Communist Party chief in the Republic of Georgia and a new Politburo member, was named to replace Gromyko, who will be 76 years old July 18.

Gromyko, once known as "Mr. Nyet" for casting a string of Soviet vetoes at the United Nations in the depths of the Cold War, has been foreign minister for 28 years under five party leaders, starting with Nikita S. Khrushchev.

Met Many U.S. Leaders

He has conferred with every American President since Franklin D. Roosevelt, advised Soviet leader Josef Stalin at Tehran, Yalta and Potsdam conferences and assisted in founding the United Nations.

In nominating him for the largely ceremonial position, Gorbachev called Gromyko "an eminent politician, one of the oldest party members." The 57-year-old Shevardnadze, by contrast, has practically no foreign experience, although he is regarded by Western observers as a smart and effective leader in the Gorbachev style.

As usual in the Supreme Soviet, both Gromyko and Shevardnadze (pronounced Sheh-vard-NAHD-zyeh) were elected by a show of hands, with no dissenting votes.

The Gromyko switch came as a surprise because each of Gorbachev's three most recent predecessors also held the office of president.

In fact, it was Gorbachev who argued that the party general secretary also should occupy the role of head of state when he nominated Konstantin U. Chernenko for the position in April, 1984.

Former Soviet leader Leonid I. Brezhnev became the first party chief to add the title of president, in 1977, replacing the little-known Nikolai V. Podgorny. Brezhnev said at the time that the title would place the general secretary on the same footing with other heads of state, such as the American President.

But on Tuesday, Gorbachev said the party's Central Committee at its meeting the previous day "found it advisable" that he should concentrate on major domestic tasks rather than take on additional duties.

Western diplomats said, however, that Gorbachev was clearly calling the shots in the unexpected

maneuver after Monday's dumping of his chief rival, Grigory V. Romanov, from the ruling body.

Gorbachev was elected to the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet, a government post that would give him official standing to meet with foreign dignitaries. The Supreme Soviet is the nation's nominal parliament.

His close associate, Yegor K. Ligachev, was named chairman of the Foreign Affairs Commission of the Supreme Soviet, a position Gorbachev held before he was named general secretary.

Western diplomats said they believed that Ligachev, 64, is now the heir-apparent, just as Gorbachev was during Chernenko's brief tenure.

When Ligachev's new post was approved, he and Gorbachev appeared together on the rostrum, smiling broadly. Ligachev vaulted into political prominence recently, rising from the party Secretariat to full Politburo status last April without the usual period as a candidate or non-voting member.

In Tuesday's Supreme Soviet session, however, it was mainly Gromyko's day. He sat unsmiling on the podium in his usual somber gray suit, eyelids closed at times as if he were napping.

When Gorbachev reached over to shake hands in congratulation, the man sometimes known as "Grim Grom" permitted himself a small smile in return.

At the lectern, Gromyko made a brief speech thanking Gorbachev for praising him, adding, "It is not for me to judge whether I deserve such words or not . . . I am deeply moved . . ."

Though some Western diplomats said Gromyko was sidelined or even "kicked upstairs," there was no sign of any rift between Gorbachev and the durable diplomat. In fact, Gromyko strongly supported the 54-year-old party chief for the top Kremlin job last march.



Reuters

Eduard Shevardnadze

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Shevardnadze, who won a reputation for fighting corruption and economic innovations in his native Georgia, was nominated by Nikolai A. Tikhonov, the premier.

Tikhonov said his wide experience in party and government posts, persistence and initiative as well as his "great erudition and culture" indicates that he will be able to handle his new duties.

A tall, good-looking, silver-haired man, Shevardnadze did not speak at the session, but he acknowledged applause from his seat on the rostrum.

Meeting With Shultz

One of his first major tasks will be to confer with Secretary of State George P. Shultz at Helsinki during a late July conference of foreign ministers on the 10th anniversary of the Helsinki accords.

In view of his limited experience, however, Western diplomats predicted that Gromyko will continue to exert some influence on foreign affairs, and that Gorbachev will have a freer hand to make changes in the future.

But the diplomats predicted that Soviet foreign policy—which changes only gradually, if at all—will remain on course despite Gromyko's departure.

So did Vladimir B. Lomeiko, a Foreign Ministry spokesman, who added, "All our decisions are made collectively." Shevardnadze has been to India, Portugal and Algeria with Soviet delegations, but he has spent most of his career in Georgia in party or police work. He has been the leader in the Transcaucasian republic since 1972.

"He certainly will be a fresh face in foreign affairs," said the ambassador of a Western nation who expressed surprise at the choice of a replacement for the masterful Gromyko.

In the United States, Shevard-

nadze's appointment shocked both foreign policy officials in the government and Kremlinologists outside of government, Times staff writer James Gerstenzang reported in Washington.

A Reagan Administration official, speaking on the condition that he not be identified by name, said the new foreign minister "has a reputation as an energetic person, one who made his mark as an anti-corruption type, one who has some ties to . . . the KGB," the Soviet security police and intelligence service.

But, the official pointed out, he is "something of a novice" not only in foreign policy but also in the realm of politics at the uppermost levels of the Soviet Union.

2 Divergent Theories

"It is impossible to make any judgment about what he'd do as foreign minister," the official said. But he said there were two divergent theories within the government: Gromyko was "kicked upstairs," and Gorbachev will take over the chief foreign policy role; or Gromyko has been given a substantive job and will maintain control over foreign policy, but with enhanced authority.

Reflecting the surprise with which the announcement caught the Reagan Administration, the official said, "If you were drawing up a list of people likely to be the next foreign minister of the Soviet Union, I don't think his name would come rolling up to the top."

Harry Gelman, a senior staff member of the Rand Corp. of Santa Monica and a former CIA expert on

the Soviet Union, said Shevardnadze's elevation was "the single most extraordinary aspect of this change. He has no experience in this field. The whole thing, taken together, is a very extraordinary display of political muscle by Gorbachev . . . a very flamboyant display of political influence," he said.

Gelman said Gorbachev has carried out a more rapid consolidation of power than Stalin, Khrushchev or Brezhnev.

"He was able in one swoop to get the votes to push Romanov out and push Gromyko upstairs. To bring in this guy Shevardnadze as foreign minister means only one thing: Gorbachev intends to be his own foreign minister," Gelman said.

He said that the new foreign minister will be "much more dependent on Gorbachev than Gromyko was" in carrying out foreign policy. However, he said that Gromyko, as president, could continue to play a foreign policy role, meeting with foreign leaders and sitting on the defense council, although he would probably play "a much more subsidiary role" than in the past.

Gelman said that while the shift does not indicate what course Soviet foreign policy would follow in the future, it indicates Gorbachev will be freer to make policy changes. Such changes must still be approved by the Politburo, however.

Describing Shevardnadze, Gelman said: "He's a cop. He's tough. He's known for cracking down on the endemic Georgian corruption. I don't know that he has any experience in foreign policy."